



Save the Sound[®]

Action for our region's environment.

Testimony on House Bill No. 5037 before the Appropriations Committee

Submitted by David Anderson, Land Campaigns Manager

Save the Sound

February 16, 2022

Save the Sound is a nonprofit organization representing over 4,200 member households and 10,000 activists statewide. Our mission is to protect and improve the land, air, and water of Connecticut and the entire Long Island Sound region. We use legal and scientific expertise and bring citizens together to achieve results that benefit our environment for current and future generations.

Co-Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice-Chairs Hartley, Dathan, and Nolan, Ranking Members Miner and France, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present **testimony on behalf of Save the Sound in support of H.B. No. 5037**, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. Save the Sound submits this testimony regarding funding for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP).

DEEP Staffing: We wish to express support for the 26 positions identified to help coordinate with the Department of Transportation on an expanded transportation infrastructure program and the 27 positions to support programs such as clean water, transportation electrification, clean school buses, ecosystem projects, and resiliency projects.

As noted in our testimony during last year's session, the Department has shown tremendous leadership and perseverance in working to fulfill its mandate through a decline in resources over the past two decades, further compounded by the current retirement cliff. The budgeted positions will allow the Department to continue to fulfill these core obligations while, at the same time, allowing it to begin fulfilling the increasingly important and urgent role for state government in confronting the climate crisis. These positions are critical to ensuring the Department will be able to carry out the provisions of Executive Order No. 21-3 as well as many of the near-term actions recommended by the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) as contained in the January 2021 Phase 1 Report.

State Parks Investments: We strongly support the allocation of \$25 million from the Federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds, along with the \$30 million in additional bonding, to make investments in our state parks, enhancing the visitor experience, and increasing outdoor recreation and education opportunities.

Connecticut state parks and outdoor recreation areas provide residents the opportunity to connect with the natural beauty of our landscape, learn about wildlife and ecosystems, and experience healthy social and recreation opportunities. It is imperative that we continue to invest in our state parks to ensure that these benefits are secured for future generations. It is also important that a portion of this funding be utilized to improve park access, especially for disproportionately impacted communities across the state, through the continuation and enhancement of programs like ParkConneCT, which was piloted during the summer of 2021 and provided free-fare bus and shuttle service to state parks and beaches.

Open Space: We support the continued full-funding of the Community Investment Act account and the inclusion of the bond authorization for grant-in-aid to municipalities to support DEEP's Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA); however, we respectfully ask the Appropriations Committee to consider allocating additional Federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds towards the OSWA program.

The proposed investment in state parks is desperately needed and should be prioritized within the proposed budget, but if additional funding could be made available from elsewhere to support open space acquisition, it would help leverage municipal ARPA funding and position the State to make substantive progress towards its open space acquisition goals. As the state parks have seen an unprecedented increase in visitation over the past several years, with some parks such as Hammonasset State Park reaching capacity at times, Connecticut residents have also flocked to the lesser known open spaces and trail networks that exist throughout the State. While the state parks are the crown jewel for outdoor recreation in Connecticut, the open space properties owned and managed by municipalities and local land trusts are the unsung heroes. These spaces not only play a role in supplementing our state park system for outdoor recreation, but they also provide a myriad of other benefits ranging from positive health impacts to climate change mitigation. It's imperative that we capitalize on this unique opportunity to partner with municipalities and local land trusts to protect some of the few remaining natural areas we have left.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony, and for your public service.

Sincerely,

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